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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - IRAQI ELECTIONS
PARIS - MONDAY, JANUARY 31, 2005

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

IRAQI ELECTIONS

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

THE IRAQI ELECTIONS ARE OVERWHELMINGLY FEATURED IN TODAY'S EDITORIAL COMMENTARIES AND ON MOST FRONT PAGES. STORIES FOCUSED ON THE FESTIVE ATMOSPHERE SURROUNDING THE VOTE AND SOUNDED CAUTIONARY NOTES ABOUT THE NEXT STEPS IN IRAQ'S DEMOCRATIC PROCESS.

HERE BELOW A SAMPLE OF TODAY'S HEADLINES:

"IRAQ: A LESSON IN DEMOCRACY" (RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE FIGARO)

"IRAQ SUCCEEDS IN ITS FIRST ELECTORAL TEST" (RIGHT-OF-CENTER LES ECHOS)

"IRAQI VOTERS BRAVE VIOLENCE" (CATHOLIC LA CROIX)

"IRAQ HAS VOTED" (LEFT-OF-CENTER LIBERATION)

"VOTERS AND CASUALTIES" (POPULAR RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE PARISIEN)

"IRAQ: THE DANGERS OF AN ISLAMIC SHIITE VICTORY" (POPULAR RIGHT-OF-CENTER FRANCE SOIR)

WHILE MOST COMMENTATORS AGREE THAT A HISTORIC VOTE HAS TAKEN PLACE IN IRAQ, A VARIETY OF ASSESSMENTS ARE PERCEIVABLE, FROM THE DANGERS OF A SHIITE THEOCRACY AND A QUICK EXIT BY THE COALITION TO THE CONCERNS OF REGIONAL ARAB REGIMES. (SEE PART C)

THE SPOKESMAN FOR THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT, JEAN-FRANCOIS COPE, WHO SPOKE ON EUROPE ONE RADIO LAST EVENING, IS QUOTED IN LIBERATION: "THIS IS A SUCCESS FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, WHICH COMPLETELY SUPPORTED AND ASSISTED THE PROCESS, ALONG OF COURSE WITH THE U.S."

ANTOINE BASBOUS, DIRECTOR OF THE OBSERVATORY FOR ARAB COUNTRIES, IS INTERVIEWED IN POPULAR RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE PARISIEN (01/31): "THIS IS KILOMETER ONE OF A THOUSAND-KILOMETER LONG ROAD. THE VOTE WAS LIKE A DELIVERY WITH ACUTE LABOR PAINS. THE ELECTION WAS A NECESSARY ONE, BUT IT IS NOT ENOUGH, BECAUSE DEMOCRACY IS NOT SOMETHING THAT CAN BE DECREED IN A COUNTRY WHICH HAS KNOWN ONLY DICTATORSHIP. PATIENCE AND TIME ARE NECESSARY. TOMORROW, WHEN THE CIRCULATION BAN IS LIFTED, ATTACKS WILL START AGAIN. VIOLENCE IS FAR FROM OVER IN IRAQ."

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

IRAQI ELECTIONS

"BUSH, VICTORIOUS"

CHARLES LAMBROSCHINI IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE FIGARO (01/31): "GEORGE W. BUSH IS CLAIMING FIRST VICTORY. BUT THE OUTCOME OF THESE ELECTIONS COULD WELL TURN OUT TO BE AMBIGUOUS, SOMEWHAT LIKE THE PROVERBIAL GLASS, EITHER HALF EMPTY OR HALF FULL. EVEN SEEN AS HALF FULL, IT STILL DOES NOT MEAN THAT THE AMERICANS HAVE MANAGED TO WIN THE HEARTS AND MINDS. FAR FROM HAVING BEEN HAILED AS LIBERATORS, THE GIS ARE UNANIMOUSLY PROCLAIMED AS A FORCE OF OCCUPATION. IT IS THEIR PRESENCE THAT FEEDS THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE. IGNORANT ABOUT THE WORLD AND BLINDED BY THEIR VISION, THE AMERICANS OFTEN REACH THE RIGHT SOLUTION ONLY AFTER HAVING RUN OUT OF BAD ONES. AFTER THE INCREDIBLE ERROR OF HAVING DISBANDED IRAQ'S SECURITY FORCES, WASHINGTON DID CORRECT ITS MISTAKE. BUSH'S STUBBORNNESS, WHICH LED TO THE IRAQI QUAGMIRE, HAS AT LEAST HAD A POSITIVE OUTCOME: BUSH DID NOT LISTEN TO THOSE WHO SUGGESTED POSTPONING THE ELECTION. BUT THESE ELECTIONS ARE BUT THE BEGINNING OF A LONG ROAD. IF THE SHIITES GIVE IN TO THE TEMPTATION OF THEOCRACY, THE SUNNIS TO THE FASCINATION OF SUICIDE AND THE KURDS TO THE OBSESSION OF INDEPENDENCE, ALL WILL BE LOST. THIS IS WHY FRANCE, AND ALL THE ALLIES MUST HELP AMERICA TO GET OUT OF THE IRAQI QUAGMIRE."

"LESSONS FROM THE IRAQIS"

DOMINIQUE GERBAUD IN CATHOLIC LA CROIX (01/31): "FINALLY, GOOD NEWS. THIS LESSON IN DEMOCRACY AND THIS DESIRE TO RESIST AGAINST THE PRESSURES AND THREATS OF THE TERRORISTS GIVE AT LEAST TWO IDEAS ABOUT THE IRAQIS' STATE OF MIND. FIRST, THAT THE PEOPLE OF IRAQ ARE MORE PEACEFUL THAN THE IMAGES WE HAVE BEEN GETTING FROM IRAQ. THE OTHER LESSON IS ONE SENT TO THE

AMERICANS: BY VOTING, THE IRAQIS ARE SAYING THAT THEY WILL NOT ALLOW A FOREIGN POWER TO MANAGE THEIR COUNTRY FOR THE DURATION. THE AMERICANS, WHO CAN FEEL RELIEVED FOR NOT HAVING CAVED IN, WANTED A DEMOCRATIC, STABLE AND FRIENDLY IRAQI GOVERNMENT. THEY MAY GET DEMOCRATIC AND STABLE, AS FOR FRIENDLY, THAT'S A TOTALLY DIFFERENT STORY."

"LEGITIMACY"

PATRICK SABATIER IN LEFT-OF-CENTER LIBERATION (01/31): "THE FIRST ELECTIONS IN IRAQ MAY NOT HAVE BEEN ALL THAT `FREE AND LEGAL,' BUT THEY HAVE NEVERTHELESS BEEN A GREAT VICTORY FOR THE IRAQIS - `KAMIKAZES OF DEMOCRACY' OPPOSING `KAMIKAZES OF TERROR.' THE FINAL RESULTS WILL CONFER ON THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY MORE LEGITIMACY THAN SADDAM HUSSEIN EVER HAD OR THAN THE INTERIM GOVERNMENT. BUT ONLY ON THE CONDITION THAT IT NOT AIM TO IMPLEMENT A SHIITE MONOPOLY OR A THEOCRACY. AND THAT IT NEGOTIATE WITH THE SUNNI MINORITY. IT MUST ALSO BE THE PREMISE FOR A RAPID WITHDRAWAL OF THE OCCUPATION FORCES WHICH ARE GUARANTEEING ITS PROTECTION. INCREASINGLY, THESE FORCES ARE BECOMING PART OF THE PROBLEM RATHER THAN PART OF THE SOLUTION."

"A VOTE WHICH PLEASES AMERICANS AND IRANIANS"

JEAN-CLAUDE KIEFER IN REGIONAL LES DERNIERES NOUVELLES D'ALSACE (01/31): "THE SUNNI COMMUNITY. LARGELY BOYCOTTED THE BALLOT BOX. ITS FATE SEEMS TO BE OF LITTLE INTEREST TO WASHINGTON. IN ORDER TO TIGHTEN TRANSATLANTIC TIES, SOME CAPITALS HAVE TOADIED (TO WASHINGTON) BY PROCLAIMING (THE VOTE) A `VICTORY FOR DEMOCRACY'. THE AMERICANS. THEREBY GAIN THE LEGITIMACY THEY WERE UNABLE TO OBTAIN. IN 2003. WHAT WILL CHANGE IN THE DAILY LIVES OF THE IRAQI POPULATION AFTER THESE ELECTIONS? NO DOUBT NOTHING."

"HISTORY AND SMOKESCREENS"

JEAN-CLAUDE MAURICE IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE JOURNAL DU DIMANCHE (01/30 - BEFORE THE ELECTION): "THESE ELECTIONS ARE NATIONAL ELECTIONS IN NAME ONLY. EVERYONE HAS BEEN SAYING HOW `DIFFICULT' THE VOTING CONDITIONS ARE AND GEORGE BUSH HAS BEEN SAYING HOW `COURAGEOUS' THE IRAQIS ARE. TWO MAJOR UNDERSTATEMENTS. BY HOLDING TO THE SCHEDULE, PRESIDENT BUSH IS IN A WAY JUSTIFYING HIS WAR. Mired in Iraq, the Bush Administration is looking for an out. Now all is set for the alibi of an exit strategy without losing face, a job unfinished and a country in ruins. Beyond the symbol of a newfound freedom, these elections resolve nothing. We must hope that the new government will not lead to an Iran-like theocracy. Never have elections taken place amidst such confusion, and their outcome been so opaque. As for terrorism, it will not wane after these elections, a smoke screen for America's good conscience. Washington and London, before the results are even in, have decided on an exit strategy, with the risk of letting Iraq plunge into a bloody civil war, a prelude to partition. But on this `historic' day we must not speak of anything bad. The only certainty is that it offers the coalition forces a return ticket home. As for the bill, give it to the UN, which as everyone has been able to see, is back in Washington's good graces."

"A SHIITE CRESCENT IN THE CENTER OF THE MIDDLE EAST?"

THOMAS DE ROCHECHOUART IN POPULAR RIGHT-OF-CENTER FRANCE SOIR (01/31): "NEXT TO THE IRANIANS, AND WHEN IT COMES TO THE DOMINO EFFECT, THE AMERICANS MAY BE ONLY AMATEURS. WITH THE INNOCENCE OF A SORCERER'S APPRENTICE, WASHINGTON HAS REDISTRIBUTED THE DECK OF CARDS IN THE MIDDLE EAST, AND BY SO DOING IT HAS RE-ENFORCED ITS TWO MAJOR ENEMIES: SYRIA AND IRAN!.. IRAN WILL BE THE GREAT WINNER OF THIS NEW CARD GAME. WHICH IS ALREADY WORRYING THE REST OF THE SUNNI REGIMES IN THE REGION. JORDAN IS ACCUSING TEHRAN OF CREATING A SORT OF `SHIITE CRESCENT' IN THE MIDDLE EAST. AFTER SOUTHERN IRAQ, THE MOVEMENT COULD SPREAD TO BAHREIN, SAUDI ARABIA, AND EVEN LEBANON. A SORT OF SHIITE DOMINO EFFECT." LEACH